

# **Commercial Vehicle Driver Safety Improvement Proposal**

*Truckers for Safer Highways*

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## Who We Are

We are a group of professional, working Truck drivers.

We are alarmed at the number of severe, avoidable collisions involving commercial vehicles we see on an almost-daily basis. While these incidents have become increasingly worse in Northern Ontario, it has become a problem throughout the entire country.

Our hope is to see commercial drivers become the safest drivers on the highways, as this should be the case already.

## Our Goals

1. To achieve a higher standard of commercial drivers across Canada with the knowledge to prevent and avoid serious collisions, and to make it more uncommon to hear of a commercial vehicle involved in an at-fault collision.
2. To mandate serious changes to the way new drivers achieve and acquire commercial vehicle licenses in Canada, starting with making the training and teaching process more like an apprenticeship program.
3. To see new, more serious and harsher penalties directed at professional commercial drivers who are found at fault in an incident.
4. To propose and create a federal standard for truck driver training across Canada, to which licensed professional drivers in all provinces and territories would be subject.

## Our Request of Members of Government

We need to see some major changes to the safety and mindsets within the trucking industry. There are many of us drivers who see poor decisions made by other drivers on a regular basis. These are decisions that put lives at risk, and all too often take lives. As drivers, we are being regulated in many ways, for example ELD log books, with the goals of safety in mind but yet the regularity of collisions continues to increase.

We are in an industry that, if shut down, causes major issues in the supply chain of products throughout our nation. When one of the two major routes through northern Ontario to Western Canada is closed due to a fatality, collision, or poor weather conditions, it causes major delays through the supply chain down the line. These are often delays that can be prevented with properly trained drivers. This being said, there are drivers that take pride in their job and the safety of all others on the highway. Below you will see some of the most common things witnessed by drivers and the public on our highways. These

issues stated below are major safety issues and need to be corrected. These are issues that are completely driver-error, and driver-neglect of the public.

## Concerns/safety issues

### Insufficient Training

There are many truck license training schools / courses that a person can choose from throughout the country. Unfortunately, some of these programs have been improperly regulated. This is what we believe is one of the major underlying factors to the huge safety issues within the trucking industry. New student drivers are required to have spent a government-mandated number of hours in training. The number of hours varies between provinces but the underlying problems seem to be similar.

New drivers are trained in trucks that have no weight in the trailers. This is a major flaw in the training of a new driver. A highway truck reacts differently when the unit is loaded with freight than it does when it's empty. Highway trucks rely on air brakes for stopping power. This is a system that responds very differently depending on the weight and speed of the truck. Which in turn is a major reason why students MUST be trained how to drive a highway truck with and without weight in a trailer. This is also an issue for when a driver must make safe choices when turning onto a highway or merging into traffic. The driver must be aware of the time it will take them to join traffic or join the speed of traffic in order to avoid "cutting off" another driver.

New drivers are trained to "pass the test" and not necessarily trained to be a safe and professional driver and member of the industry. This is obviously a major problem. These training schools must be teaching the new drivers to be professionals and to be safe and through this ideology most students will pass their government testing and receive their Commercial Drivers' license (in Ontario it is known as an AZ license in the western provinces it is known as a class 1A). It should also be pointed out that not everyone is the right candidate to become a truck driver and that's okay, that is why we have the Government testing. But we must make sure this testing is done properly to qualify or disqualify drivers properly. But we must not continually allow training schools to train students just enough to "pass the test", as this is not an acceptable method or idea. This will lead to improperly trained drivers behind the wheel.

New drivers are not properly taken through areas that are filled with different terrains such as hills, curves, heavy traffic and poor weather conditions. How can this be acceptable training for a driver expected to be in control of a vehicle weighing up to 80,000 pounds, or in some cases in Canada even as high as 140,000 pounds on a regular basis.

New drivers are rarely shown or trained in things such as load securement or vehicle and weight management. As well as properly following jurisdictional restrictions and guidelines regarding vehicle weights.

New drivers are rarely shown how to operate the ELD (electronic logging device) which were expected to become mandatory across the industry in Canada as of the summer of 2021. Set aside the operation of these devices and look at the training of HOS (hours of service) rules, regulations, and records training. This is something that drivers are consistently scrutinized for and it is often not covered in driver training schools. In our eyes, this is a major issue. How can this be a topic that is not heavily covered in driver training? It is a requirement industry wide to track you're driving, on-duty, off-duty, and time spent in the sleeper berth. This definitely needs to be something thoroughly taught to new drivers.

## Lack of Commercial Enforcement

The number of commercial vehicle enforcement officers has drastically declined as much as 38% in Ontario alone since the year 2012. This is a considerable decline in a resource that can be used to address safety concerns on our highways. As the number of officers has lessened across the country the number of trucks that cross our nation has consistently risen each year. This is truly concerning when, as a group, we can note how often which scale and inspection station is open and when completely across the country. It has become clear that for many drivers it is common practice to plan to avoid a scale or inspection station and it is easy to do so right across the country. This creates another possibility for more unsafe vehicles or drivers to use our highways unchecked.

## Improper Seating

It is not unheard of to see a driver with the truck at highway speeds sitting with their feet on the dash of the truck or even out the window. This is now a common sight.

## Poor distance choices

This is regularly the cause of major accidents throughout the country. All too often a driver decides to take a chance and pass another highway truck when not enough distance is available, or the distance needed to pass is not in clear sight. This puts the drivers in oncoming traffic at risk as well as the driver being overtaken. These decisions made in poor judgement are made due to lack of training and awareness of the vehicle's abilities. We cannot allow drivers to continually make poor choices due to negligence and/or lack of knowledge.

## Distracted Driving

Distracted driving is also a major factor causing these terrible and often fatal accidents. It often takes the length of a few football fields to stop a fully loaded highway truck. If the driver is distracted especially in an area where the traffic volume is higher the likelihood of a safe reaction time is significantly lower.

## Insufficient Safe Overnight Parking

This is a major issue throughout Ontario but even across the entire country. We are aware of the recent proposals and plans by the Ontario government to improve safe parking and rest areas throughout Ontario, but frankly it doesn't sound like it will be enough and definitely does not sound like it will be soon enough. More and more trucks travel our country each week and when parking is hard to find, drivers continue to drive or park in unsafe locations along the highways or on roads that trucks shouldn't be on in the first place. We need safe and available parking areas with fair, clean, and safe restrooms.

## Our Recommendations

### Training

We need to see some major changes to the training of our aspiring commercial drivers. More one-on-one time needs to be spent with the instructor doing in-cab training. More time needs to be focused on understanding the vehicle you are operating so the driver is aware of the time it may take to overtake another truck or the timing it would take to enter a highway without impeding the flow of traffic already on the desired highway. Drivers must also be taught and shown much more on driving in winter conditions. Things as simple as knowing when to stop driving and finding a safe spot to park in a storm, or seeing and knowing the signs of dangerous and icy conditions. As well as knowing your own personal abilities and if the highway conditions have surpassed your abilities.

### Enforcement

Our commercial vehicle enforcement agencies across the country need much more support to continue the important work that they do to ensure the safe operations of all commercial drivers on the highway. We would like to see increased hiring on the part of all these agencies to ensure these positions and roles are not short staffed. Scales and inspection stations need to be operated at more regular rates. To add to that more training needs to be given to everyday enforcement officers such as the O.P.P. or the R.C.M.P. to ensure they know the rules that need to be enforced as far as log book violations and equipment and vehicle safety. All too often we have heard stories of drivers being stopped

with officers seeming unsure about what to ask to see on a log book. The number of officers assigned to a certain division needs to proportionately reflect the average number of commercial traffic flowing through that area at any given day. There also needs to be the expectation that scales and officers will, at times, be working on weekends which is currently not the case.

## Safe Parking

Across Canada, especially along highways 401, 17, 11, TransCanada 1, and highway 16 from Manitoba across to B.C., the safe rest areas and parking that includes amenities such as showers and food options are not as accessible as they need to be. In Ontario, the OnRoute rest areas are an embarrassment to the trucking industry; with little large vehicle parking and very few have a fueling option and none have showers available for drivers. How can it be acceptable to expect drivers who travel these routes regularly to not have reasonable and proper access to showers. The northern Ontario routes are even worse with hours and hours between accessible parking in an environment when the weather can change within minutes. Drivers need a place to be able to park if they find the conditions unsafe or beyond their abilities as a driver to continue and not continue driving for hours because there is nowhere safe for them to stop.

The prairies are no better if not worse. The only improvement is that some of the major routes of travel are divided so drivers' only concern in poor weather conditions is staying on the road and not as much about the vehicles coming towards them. But in the prairies, we now run into the problems of truck stops or rest areas being full or over capacity. This is clearly because the size and number of truck stops and rest areas are not proportionate to the number of commercial vehicles traveling across our vast and ever-changing country. British Columbia is a minor improvement with its rest areas due to the "Brake Check" mandatory stops and chain up locations that are available for commercial drivers on major routes. But the availability of showers and other amenities are also quite lacking especially on the mainland where it is not proportional to the drivers traveling through.

The issues above need immediate action from municipal, provincial, and federal governments to support truck stop franchises and other businesses to set up in prime locations and operate a clean and essential business. These businesses are essential to drivers and need the support from all levels of government to operate and build in new prime locations to be available to the industry. These sorts of businesses need to see the value in operating in Canada and our provincial jurisdictions.

This must become an important focus of all levels of government. Federally it helps promote trade and commerce flow smoothly. Provincially, it adds to the professionalism of the drivers when they can take care of themselves better. It helps them feel better throughout the day. And there will be much less stress on a driver when they know there are safe places to stop often enough that they do not need to drive for a lengthy period of

time when the weather conditions are not favorable. For municipal jurisdictions it will have a direct impact on their local economy. These new businesses often operate 24 hours a day and require employees. This also adds to the ease in which a trucker can make early morning deliveries to the local communities instead of bringing in the deliveries mid-day to late afternoon.

## Federal Standards

As it stands, the federal government does regulate some of the trucking industry, but this is where we see a problem. Truck drivers often travel to different states, provinces or territories where there may be different rules and laws. Traveling across Canada, for example, can put a driver through many different and changing weather conditions, let alone the different environments between the Prairies and Ontario, compared to the Rocky Mountains, as far as northern portions of our country which are often very different again.

We would like to see the federal government put forth a federal standard of training required by all drivers entering the industry or wishing to acquire their license. New drivers across Canada need to be trained for all possible conditions and changes in the weather. It is common to hear new drivers say they don't feel like they are properly prepared to even start the job on their own. Creating a standard of training that would require every training school across the province to follow that extensively goes through driving and operating both a loaded and empty commercial vehicle in all conditions is vital to ensuring all drivers entering the industry are prepared when they enter our roadways.

## Licensing Requirements

It is our concern that drivers have been able to acquire a commercial drivers' license too quickly. In some cases, these drivers have very little experience driving a passenger vehicle in Canada, let alone a commercial vehicle. This is a clear issue as far as we are concerned and must change. To acquire a commercial vehicle license we believe that a minimum age requirement is important as well as a period of time holding a passenger vehicle license. To add to this, as with the MELT program in Ontario and other similar programs across Canada there needs to be a clear training requirement by a third party and not by a private commercial carrier. This practice of in-house commercial license training has proved, in our eyes, unacceptable and unproductive, likely resulting in serious collisions.

## To recap: our goals

1. To achieve a higher standard of commercial drivers across Canada with the knowledge to prevent and avoid serious collisions, and to make it more uncommon to hear of a commercial vehicle involved in an at-fault collision.
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## Conclusion

As truckers for safer highways, we hope to change the rapid decline in safety and unacceptable standards within the trucking industry. We must put a stop to these fundamental safety issues.

As drivers ourselves, we know firsthand of all the issues outlined above. We are also aware that these are just a sample of the issues putting the safety of all who use our highways at risk. When reading this and deciding whether or not you should take action in the best way you can, just remember this: that truck driving beside you on the 401 may have a poorly trained driver in the seat, or when your family member is traveling to the cottage and they see a truck coming towards them in their lane of travel. Remember that the driver was not likely even trained properly.

What are you going to do about it?



## Contact information

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